

St. Margaret's Seeks to Preserve Property

By SUSANNA SHEEHAN

The Society of St. Margaret's convent has been talking with Patricia Loring, Open Space Committee chairman, about ways to preserve its 13.17 acre Washington St. property while raising funds to create an endowment to maintain it in the future.

One idea that appeals to the

order of Episcopal nuns is selling the town a conservation restriction on the major portion of the land that abuts Washington St. and also selling it one waterfront lot.

The entire property could be subdivided into a maximum of nine house lots, according to an appraiser hired by the town in

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June 1998 with money from the Conservation Fund. The appraised value of the property was just under \$2 million a year ago, but with the town's current booming real estate market it could be worth more.

However, the nuns would prefer not to divide or sell their land at all. Selling the town a conservation restriction on the majority of the acreage would mean giving up their right to develop the land in the future but would allow them to retain ownership. Selling the town one waterfront parcel would give the Society enough money to start an endowment.

"They don't want to see any changes," said Loring, who has been discussing plans for the property with the sisters for two years. "They are really committed to continuing to keep it the way you see it. They need funds and they want to build an endowment to maintain their Duxbury property in perpetuity. They don't want to give up ownership."

Right now details are unknown about the size of the waterfront parcel and how much the whole package would cost. Loring gave a rough estimate of almost \$1 million for the waterfront lot



St. Margaret's convent on Washington Street

and approximately \$700,000 for the conservation restriction. She said that private funds would be raised to offset the costs.

Also unknown is how the town would use the lot it bought. Whether it would be for conservation purposes or for open space or for another use has not been determined.

"None of the details have been worked out," said Loring. "These are conceptual plans only."

Loring met with selectmen last week in executive session and on Monday night with abutters to discuss the proposal. She said the neighbors showed "a good deal of support for the project."

The next step is to have the town manager assemble a negotiating team to work out the

details with the Society, said Loring. She also hopes a citizen's group will form to promote the project before the annual town meeting in 2000.

The Society of St. Margaret bought the property in 1904 when it was the Wadsworth farm. The original farmhouse is still there. The land abuts both Washington St. and Harden Hill Rd. and has frontage on Duxbury bay. For many years, the nuns used it only in the summer and ran an overnight camp for inner-city children until the 1960s, said Loring. Now, they use the property year-round for retreats and lease it in the summer to the Girl Scouts for a day camp. The Society of St. Margaret is based in Roxbury and has approximately 50 members worldwide.